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ABSTRACT

This information brief discusses the impact of commercialism in schools. It asks the question of whether such advertising is supporting students or is simply selling access. It describes how children are a desirable market since they have most of their purchases ahead of them; they can also frequently convince parents to buy items. The brief describes the growth of commercialism, tracing its origin to the practice of selling goods to raise money for extracurricular programs. These activities have grown and diversified. A 1995 report divided commercial activities in schools into four categories: inschool advertising; classroom magazines and television programs; corporate-sponsored educational materials and programs; and corporate-sponsored contests and incentive programs. The debate over Channel 1, an example of inschool advertising, indicates the degree of controversy surrounding these efforts. Other programs that have generated discussion include schools making contracts with soda makers and the practice of corporations developing and distributing free or low-cost curricular materials with a marketing component to schools. Many educators claim that inadequate financing prompts them to consider such programs. Tips on managing commercialism and how to control private dollars in public schools are provided. (RJM)

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INFOBRIEF

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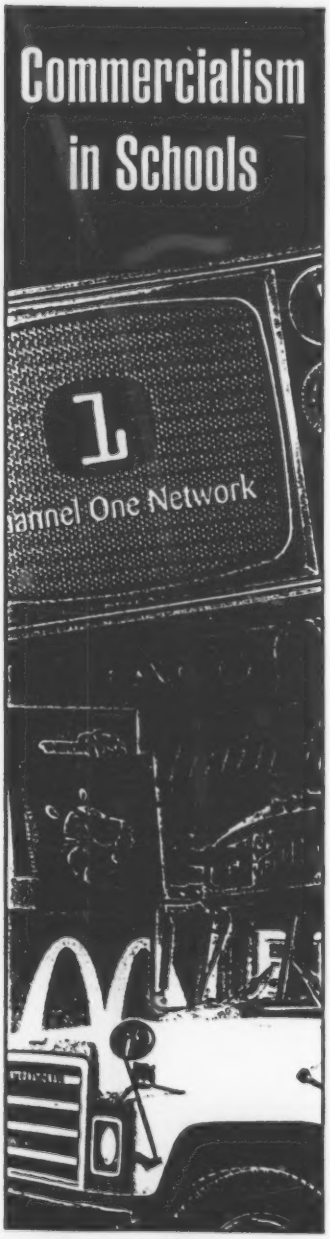

Supporting Students or Selling Access?

By Erik W. Robelen

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INFOBRIEF

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Supporting Students or Selling Access?

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Commercial interests are gaining an ever-expanding presence in public schools. Once relegated largely to school yearbooks, student newspapers, and athletic fields, commercialism has made inroads into education on many fronts, from sponsored curricular materials to advertisements on school buses, in hallways, and in classrooms.

Marketers have grown increasingly aware of children's tremendous buying power and have found creative ways to tap into what was once considered the last stronghold from advertising and commercialism: the schoolhouse. In some cases, school officials themselves are seeking lucrative deals to bring in more resources. The issue has generated significant media attention. A Georgia high school made headlines nationwide this year when a student was suspended for wearing a Pepsi-Cola T-shirt on "Coke in Education Day."

Some educators and business people argue that commercial arrangements are an acceptable response to budgetary shortfalls. They explain that in many cases schools seem unable to secure adequate funding through traditional means. Obtaining needed equipment and financial resources in exchange for a limited degree of advertising or an exclusive contract makes good fiscal sense and does not impede the learning process, they say.

Such thinking, however, is far from unanimous. Critics complain that students are a captive audience and should not be subjected to commercial influences in public schools. They fear that schools betray the public trust by selling access to students' identities, desires, and values (Giroux, 1998). Some parents and educators worry that commercial deals imply an endorsement of certain products and that schools are producing brand-loyal consumers.

Until now, policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels have paid little attention to commercialism in schools. Some states have rules regarding advertising on school buses, and a handful of districts have formulated new policies to handle commercialism—though many still work from a patchwork of existing regulations not designed to handle new questions raised by commercial arrangements. Some national groups have attempted to fashion guidelines to help schools. But overall, experts say, most schools and districts are taking a reactive rather than proactive approach to commercialism.

As school budgets are continually squeezed, and as marketers become increasingly emboldened to find opportunities in schools, educators and policymakers need to consider some key questions:

- What effect does commercialism have on schools and students?
- Where should educators, families, and policymakers draw the line?
- What—if any—kinds of policies and guidelines are needed to best manage commercialism in schools? At what level should such policies be formulated: school, district, state, or federal?

The Kids Market: Billions at Stake

The growth in school commercialism reflects in part an overall explosion in marketing to children. James McNeal, a marketing professor at Texas A & M University, writes, "With all their purchases ahead of them, and with their ability to pull their parents along, children are the brightest star in the consumer constellation. Virtually every consumer-goods industry, from airlines to zinnia-seed sellers, targets kids" (1998, p. 37).

McNeal argues that children are an especially attractive audience because they "constitute not one, but three distinct markets: the primary, influence, and future markets" (p. 38). The primary market is the money kids spend themselves. McNeal estimates that in 1997 children ages 4–12 spent nearly $25 billion, triple the amount kids in this age group spent in 1991. Children's influence on spending, primarily the influence they exert on their parents, has also grown robustly, McNeal says. He suggests that by 1997 kids' direct influence may have peaked at around $188 billion. Finally, McNeal argues that the future market of kids may have more potential than the other two combined. "When companies successfully nurture kids as customers before children actually have the power to buy their products, they often create loyal future customers," McNeal writes. "That's called cradle-to-grave marketing" (p. 40).

Given the buying influence of children, school becomes an obvious target for marketers to build brand loyalty and name recognition. A recent article in *Consumer Reports* explains the attraction for companies this way: "Sponsoring educational programs achieves several goals: It builds good community relations by associating a company with a good cause; it penetrates a six-hour time period—9 a.m. to 3 p.m.—that has been traditionally off-limits to advertisers; and it gains priceless credibility for a company through association with trusted teachers" ("Reading, Writing," 1998, p. 47). Business newsletters such as *Selling to Kids* and *Youth Markets Alert*, which examine the opportunities and trends in marketing to children, are keenly aware of the expanding potential of schools. A recent article in *Selling to Kids* proclaims, "It's back to school and kids aren't the only ones heading for the classroom. Marketers are taking more and more products from the boardroom to the homeroom and lunchroom through innovative partnerships" ("In-School Marketing," 1998, p. 1).

The Growth of Commercialism

Commercialism is nothing new in schools. Examples have been around for decades, such as students selling candy bars to raise money for athletic programs and local companies sponsoring school activities. But many experts argue that there has been a dramatic shift in the frequency and nature of commercial arrangements, and that the boldness of marketers in seeking access to students has escalated. Some lament that traditional school–business partnerships are being replaced in certain instances by commercial transactions and even exploitation. Education policy analyst George Kaplan writes, "The popular phrase 'school–business partnership' can be misleading. It camouflages the crazy-quilt nature of the connection, which ranges from genuine altruism to cynical exploitation" (1996, p. K2). Isa Kaftal Zimmerman, superintendent of Acton Public Schools and Acton-Boxborough Regional School District in Massachusetts, says educators' attitudes have changed in the past few years. "We are approached [by companies] all the time," she says. Although her district rejects proposals that are too "blatant," she says schools have become more accustomed to commercial arrangements. "It used to feel commercial; now it feels normal."

TOWARD A NEW LITERACY: UNDERSTANDING MEDIA

Media literacy is becoming the educational approach of choice for some educators seeking to counterbalance the increasing commercialism and media-dominance of society. A growing number of schools are creating programs to teach young people how to analyze and understand the barrage of messages they receive daily from television, radio, computers, newspapers, magazines, and advertising. "Our goal must be to help people become competent, critical, and literate in all media forms so that they control the interpretation of what they see or hear rather than letting the interpretation control them," writes Elizabeth Thoman, executive director of the Center for Media Literacy (1998, p. 1).

Thoman argues that for policymakers, the best ways to promote media literacy are to build it into the standards and frameworks of student requirements and make it a focus in teacher education. The New Mexico Media Literacy Project has been working hard to raise the profile of media literacy in New Mexico and elsewhere. The group's director, Bob McCannon, says New Mexico has developed standards and benchmarks for media literacy across academic disciplines. But overall, other nations appear far ahead of the United States in media literacy. In Canada, many of the provinces have followed Ontario's lead and made media literacy a mandatory part of the school curriculum. And overseas, Australia, Great Britain, and other Western European nations have long made media literacy a priority.

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Dan Merenda, president of the National Association of Partners in Education, a nonprofit that promotes partnerships among businesses, communities, and schools, criticizes arrangements in which companies have a direct marketing goal. "I don't even consider those partnerships," he says. "I consider those marketing and selling." Although school–business partnerships often involve companies donating resources or equipment, Merenda says the foundation of partnerships is not about money. "Effective partnerships are built with people," he says. But some educators suggest that so long as both sides benefit from the arrangement, it is a partnership. John Bushey, executive director of school management for School District 11 in Colorado Springs, Colorado, says his district has a number of commercial arrangements including paid advertisements in hallways and on school buses. The ads contain positive education messages such as, "Be cool, stay in school," and have the sponsor's logo. "If it's a cooperative thing . . . and both parties win, I think it's a partnership," Bushey says.

A 1995 report by Consumers Union, publisher of *Consumer Reports*, divides commercial activities in schools into four categories. First is in-school advertising, such as ads or corporate logos on buses, scoreboards, and book covers. Second is commercialism in classroom magazines and television programs. Third is corporate-sponsored educational materials and programs, including multimedia teaching kits, workbooks, posters, and other teaching aids. Fourth is corporate-sponsored contests and incentive programs, such as a program with Pizza Hut restaurants that rewards reading with free pizza (Consumers Union, 1995). Another category, though one that overlaps with Consumers Union's first, is exclusive contracts with beverage companies and other firms.

Measuring the scope of commercialism in public schools is difficult. Channel One News, a daily television program for schools that includes advertisements, is watched by more than eight million students in 12,000 middle, junior, and senior high schools, according to company estimates. Cover Concepts Inc. distributes book covers with corporate logos to 31,000 schools in the United States (Stead, 1997). The Center for Commercial-Free Public Education estimates that dozens of school districts have negotiated exclusive contracts with beverage companies.

Alex Molnar, director of the Center for the Study of Commercialism in Education at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, recently sought to better define the scope of commercialism in U.S. schools by analyzing media accounts in the popular press, education press, business press, and the advertising and marketing press (Molnar, 1998). He found the number of citations increased 154 percent between 1990 and 1997. According to Molnar, the largest category appears to be companies sponsoring programs and activities in return for the right to associate their name with the activity. The fastest growing category appears to be exclusive agreements with soda bottlers or sports products manufacturers. Molnar predicts that an emerging category is electronic marketing. For example, this fall more than 1,000 schools have signed up with Satellite Online Solutions for a program called ZapMe!, which offers schools up to 15 free computers and an online education network in return for permitting alternating corporate logos to run on the computer screens ("Advertising in Schools," 1998). Molnar acknowledges that the data from his research "are necessarily secondary data. . . . They can never provide as accurate a picture as would be possible using survey methods with a large number of schools" (Molnar, 1998, pp. 8–9).

Channel One: The Great TV Debate

Few commercial issues in schools have generated as much controversy as Primedia Inc.'s Channel One News. First aired in 1990, the daily TV program delivers 10 minutes of news and two minutes of commercial messages to participating schools. In addition to the free programming, participating schools receive free televisions and other video equipment that they can keep as long as the show is played almost every day to students. Many schools welcome the program, while others shun it because of the explicit advertising.

A number of researchers have analyzed Channel One. Molnar and the Economic Policy Institute's Max Sawicky criticize the claim that the program is free to schools, suggesting that instructional time "lost" to Channel One over the school year amounts to roughly $1.8 billion nationwide. This estimate is based on average annual per pupil costs and the percentage of the school day devoted to Channel One (Sawicky & Molnar, 1998). One study concluded that Channel One is disproportionately found in schools located in high-poverty areas, suggesting that such schools are especially vulnerable to the draw of free equipment (Morgan, 1993). Roy Fox, a professor at the University of Missouri-Columbia, looked at the effects of Channel One advertisements on kids by interviewing and observing 200 high school students in rural Missouri. Among his conclusions: students knew the details of commercials, products, and packaging; students often "blurred" or mistook commercials for public service announcements; the language of commercial messages infiltrated students' speech; and the commercials affected the students' consumer behavior (Fox, 1995).

Other studies have attacked Channel One's news content. William Hoynes, an assistant professor at Vassar College, assessed the news and educational quality of 36 Channel One episodes. He

concludes, "Channel One serves as a promotional vehicle for itself and for youth culture and style, and provides a friendly environment for . . . explicit advertisements." He argues that it is "dubious" whether the program meets even minimal educational standards (Hoynes, 1998, p. 356).

Channel One officials strongly contest this depiction. "There's been a history of attacks," says the company's vice president for education, Paul Folkemer. He insists the show has educational value and says this is an important programming consideration. "I'm always thinking, What are the curricular issues and how do they relate to what we're doing?" says Folkemer. Overall feedback through daily surveys of educators and students is very positive, he says. Research bears out this conclusion. A study of four Midwestern junior high schools, for instance, concluded that the program is popular with teachers and students. Most teachers surveyed found the news stories appropriate and newsworthy, the presentation clear and objective, and the design effective for teenagers (Tiene, 1993). The Institute for Social Research surveyed 100 schools in 1993, finding that two-thirds of teachers said they would "strongly" or "very strongly" recommend Channel One to other schools (Johnston, 1995).

One study went beyond the content of Channel One to criticize the context. Researchers Donna Celano and Susan Neuman argue that the program should not be considered educational because of the way it is used. "To use [Channel One] for educational purposes, teachers would have to preview the programs, view them regularly along with the students, and integrate their content with ongoing instruction," they write. But this was not how the program was used at a high school they observed. "Channel One was simply flipped on each day, with little preparation, discussion, or review" (Celano & Neuman, 1995, p. 446). Folkemer says the issue of integrating Channel One into the curriculum is a "very legitimate concern." In fact, he says Channel One is developing a curriculum program called "Teaching the News" that will focus on three components: (1) understanding the news; (2) media literacy—how news and advertising are created; and (3) making connections between the news and the curriculum.

Channel One has been capturing significant media attention in Alabama recently, where local activists with Obligation Inc., a local nonprofit concerned with popular culture issues, are hoping to get the State Board of Education to halt Channel One programming. The group has also recently complained about Channel One's Web site, which has allowed links to other sites with objectionable content for children. Alabama Deputy Superintendent of Education Joe Morton says Channel One will be discussed this fall at a meeting between the State Board of Education and superintendents. Morton says he will ask superintendents, "Are you so strongly persuaded that [Channel One] is essential? Is it something we want to study longer, vote to ban, or let be a local decision?" Currently, New York is the only state that bans Channel One in public schools.

The news program has periodically generated criticism elsewhere. The Center for Commercial-Free Public Education has documented a cross-section of schools from Houston, Texas, to New Castle, Pennsylvania, that have removed the program from classrooms. However, removal can also generate controversy. Students at Central High School in Springfield, Missouri, protested their principal's decision to pull the plug on Channel One. A new principal has come in this year, and teachers recently voted 44–19 to reinstate the program.

Sweet Deals: Soda Contracts with Schools

Exclusive contracts between school districts and soda bottlers appear to be one of the newer forms of commercial enterprise in the education arena. School District 11 in Colorado Springs, Colorado, recently signed a 10-year deal with Coca-Cola that will bring the district between $8.3 and $11.3 million; Denver Public Schools has sealed a five-year arrangement with Pepsi-Cola worth approximately $8.1 million; and Grapevine Colleyville School District in Texas has signed a 10-year contract with Dr Pepper worth roughly $3.45 million ("Dealing with," 1998).

The details of these arrangements vary. Carole Dorn, a spokeswoman for Lebanon City Schools in Ohio, says her district, which has six schools, recently signed a 10-year contract with Coca-Cola that will generate a minimum of $845,000 for the district. She says there was virtually no controversy surrounding the decision. "We depend so much on local taxes, that explains a lot about why we didn't hear [complaints] about it," Dorn adds. "A neighboring school district had just signed with Pepsi. We figured that if we didn't approach Coke, somebody else would." Among the stipulations in the contract are that the soda bottler

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will deliver an immediate cash payment of $100,000; the bottler will buy and install basketball scoreboards with the Coca-Cola logo; the district will receive a commission of at least $65,000 per year; the bottler will provide five $1,000 academic scholarships to graduating seniors each year; and the bottler will conduct marketing campaigns, including vending promotions designed to increase sales of the products sold.

Dan DeRose, president of DD Marketing Inc., a consulting firm that helps schools negotiate such deals, argues that schools are becoming savvier about obtaining commercial dollars. "School districts are realizing that commercialism has been in their schools for the past 25 or 30 years. [It's] just been there for free." DeRose predicts that soda contracts and other commercial arrangements will continue to increase. "Every school district of any size in the country is discussing this issue," he says. "We've been to 800 school districts in the past 12 months talking about it." Larry Jabbonsky, a spokesperson for Pepsi-Cola, says the company views commercial arrangements as both a partnership and a business-development opportunity. "It's a very natural, interdependent fit." Critics, however, find such deals unnatural, suggesting that schools should not be promoting and profiting from student consumption of soft drinks and that these deals may conflict with the educational message sent in health and nutrition classes that students should drink healthier beverages.

The Corporate Curriculum

One type of commercialism that has proven especially controversial is the practice of corporations developing and distributing free or low-cost curricular materials with a marketing component to schools. Some of the more flagrantly commercial examples have been reported widely in press accounts, such as a curriculum package that helps kids learn math by counting Tootsie Rolls and the "Prego Thickness Experiment" sponsored by the Campbell's Soup Company, which gets children to prove that Prego spaghetti sauce is thicker than a competing brand.

Other companies have sought to use their materials to promote a certain political agenda with teachers and students. In April, energy industry lobbyists met at the American Petroleum Institute to discuss plans to influence U.S. policy on reducing air emissions that contribute to global warming. A memo obtained from the meeting suggested spending up to $300,000 to influence student and teacher attitudes on global warming by recruiting scientists friendly to the industry's position to write curricular materials for schools (Drinkard, 1998).

Not all examples are this overt. Scholastic Inc., a major publisher of children's books and other educational materials, has developed a limited number of "sponsored" curriculum materials for corporations and government, including AT&T, McDonald's, Chrysler, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, says Ernest Fleishman, Scholastic's vice president for education. A recent example of Scholastic's materials is "Breaking the Barriers," an educational game based on the experiences of Jackie Robinson, the first African American to play Major League Baseball. The program is sponsored by Major League Baseball and Gatorade and is designed around the values that Robinson's life exemplified. Another example is the "All-American Reading Challenge," sponsored by McDonald's. This reading incentive program encourages students to keep a log of books they have read. Once a teacher or a parent has signed off, the child qualifies for a free meal at McDonald's.

Fleishman says Scholastic has developed guidelines for the sponsored materials it produces: (1) the product must meet Scholastic's publishing and editing standards; (2) the product

THE MILWAUKEE PRINCIPLES FOR CORPORATE INVOLVEMENT IN THE SCHOOLS

In 1990, a group of educators met at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee to develop principles on school–business relationships. These principles have been endorsed by a number of national education groups and 10 state superintendents of education (Molnar, 1996, pp. 185–186).

1. Corporate involvement shall not require students to observe, listen to, or read commercial advertising.
2. Selling or providing access to a captive audience in the classroom for commercial purposes is exploitation and a violation of the public trust.
3. Since school property and time are publicly funded, selling or providing free access to advertising on school property outside the classroom involves ethical and legal issues that must be addressed.
4. Corporate involvement must support the goals and objectives of the schools. Curriculum and instruction are within the purview of educators.
5. Programs of corporate involvement must be structured to meet an identified education need, not a commercial motive, and must be evaluated for educational effectiveness by the school or district on an ongoing basis.
6. Schools and educators should hold sponsored and donated materials to the same standards used for the selection and purchase of curriculum materials.
7. Corporate involvement programs should not limit the discretion of schools and teachers in the use of sponsored materials.
8. Sponsor recognition and corporate logos should be for identification rather than commercial purposes.

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must have "solid educational value"; (3) there must be a distinction between the sponsor and the editorial content; (4) the product must meet a real educational need; (5) the product should be age appropriate; and (6) whenever possible, educators should be involved in the product development stage. Fleishman, a former school superintendent, says he would encourage school districts to develop policies that provide guidelines for educators on what types of materials are acceptable. And he stresses that no district should require a teacher to use sponsored materials.

A 1995 report from Consumers Union evaluated commercial activities in schools, including sponsored educational materials. Of a sampling of 77 kits and packets, the group found that more than half could be considered "commercial" or "highly commercial." In addition, nearly 80 percent contained "biased or incomplete information, promoting a viewpoint that favors consumption of the sponsor's product or service or a position that favors the company or its economic agenda. A few contained significant inaccuracies" (Consumers Union, 1995).

WHERE WE STAND

In 1990, ASCD adopted the following position statement on advertising in schools:

Schools should be cautious in their use of any materials designed to promote commercial products or containing commercial advertising because students are required to attend school and are therefore a captive audience.

Schools should have guidelines for the use of materials provided by special-interest groups or by businesses that have a financial interest in advancing a particular point of view. Specifically, district policies should ensure that any commercial materials used in schools (1) are consistent with the district's values, goals, and objectives; (2) respond to a clearly defined educational need; (3) support the adopted curriculum; and (4) do not promote a brand-name product. If educators use business-sponsored materials in the classroom, they should help students identify any biases the materials may contain. If students are too young to understand the bias, the materials should not be used.

With reasonable exceptions, such as newspapers and magazines, materials containing advertising should not be used for instruction except when the purpose is to analyze the advertising itself.

Some educators appear to welcome the free curricular materials. But not everyone. Foyne Mahaffey, a 1st grade teacher at Lake Bluff School in Shorewood, Wisconsin, used to use the free kits and teaching materials distributed by corporations, but no longer does. She writes, "the fact was, every corporate calendar, filmstrip, and free admission came with a price tag: corporate promotion." Mahaffey argues that sponsored materials should be carefully scrutinized. "[Teachers] need to understand that they are the primary filters for their students, and that they may unknowingly be grooming future consumers for company profits and agendas" (1995, p. 80).

An Unfair Financial Dilemma?

When educators explain their motivation for setting up commercial arrangements, they almost invariably point to "the bottom line": money. In some cases, it is low-income districts that desperately need modern equipment. In others, it is wealthy districts that feel the pinch of ever-greater demands on their resources. Louise Henry, director of School and Community Relations for Grapevine Colleyville School District in Texas, says fiscal realities forced her school system to form a corporate sponsorship program. "We are classified as a property-wealthy school district," which requires some local dollars to be redistributed to other, poorer school districts. School administrators and board members explored options for generating additional revenue that would not be taken by the state's "recapture law" and decided to solicit commercial partnerships.

Heather-jane Robertson, author of *No More Teachers, No More Books: The Commercialization of Canada's Schools*, argues that the lost component in the debate over commercialism is what she views as the failure to provide sufficient public funding to make commercial dilemmas unnecessary. "This is really downloading social responsibility" to the local level, she says. "There is pretty incredible pressure on [parents and educators] to make decisions they shouldn't have to make."

Still, commercial dollars constitute a fraction of the money that goes to public schools, usually less than 1 percent. And many schools find themselves saying "no" to certain commercial ventures. Jack Farr, superintendent of Hoover City Schools in Alabama, says stable funding has allowed his district to shun unwanted advertising. Although the district allows corporate logos on scoreboards, advertising is not permitted in classrooms, hallways, or cafeterias. "We've been approached about putting up billboards in the cafeteria advertising products," he says, but the school has rejected such offers. In addition, the district removed Channel One from a participating school several years ago because of the advertising.

Taking Steps to Manage Commercialism

Opinions vary widely on how to handle commercialism in schools. Consumers Union argues that commercialism is completely inappropriate in school. "We believe that parents and educators must unite to make schools ad-free zones. . . . We applaud corporations that recognize that it is in their own long-range interest to provide relevant work experience to school kids and to donate basic equipment and financial resources to schools—but that attempts to peddle merchandise, services, or self-serving ideas are inappropriate" (Consumers Union, 1995). Several education groups, including the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (see *Where We Stand*, page 6), the National PTA, the American Association of School Administrators, and the National Education Association, have taken strong positions against overt commercialism in schools.

But Sally Chong, president of the Seattle Council of Parent–Teacher–Student Associations, argues that commercialism is "a very complex issue." She points to book sale fund-raisers and activities in which children sell candy bars to generate funds for schools as examples of this complexity. She adds, "When I walk into a school and see kids with Tommy Hilfiger [logos on their clothing], I say, 'Hey, you're the advertisement.'" Chong's district has formed an advisory committee on advertising composed of educators, parents, business people, and students that is tasked with developing policy recommendations for the school board. At press time, the recommendations were forthcoming.

Berkeley Unified School District in California recently developed a new policy to handle commercialism in schools. The district now has a set of guidelines for both public and private partnerships. The school board retains ultimate authority, but the district has also created a panel of educators, parents, and students to review plans and make recommendations. Miriam Topel, a Berkeley school board member, says the district wants to protect kids from commercial influences but needs money for athletic equipment. "If we can get some funds without compromising the interests of the kids, we're interested."

Ensuring broad input and forging community consensus are critical before making important decisions on commercialism, many educators argue. David Roudebush, assistant superintendent for auxiliary services in Pueblo School District 60 in Colorado, advises district officials to "spend a lot of time up front with the community, building principals, and students . . . to get their buy-in." He adds that schools should not be required to participate. Michael Resnick, associate executive director of the National School Boards Association, says that school officials considering commercial arrangements should ask themselves, "Are you truly getting value for it? . . . Have you examined it thoroughly from an education perspective?" He says educators must ensure that the arrangement is not sending the wrong message, wasting time, or otherwise distracting from the schools' education mission.

Given the growth of school commercialism, state lawmakers have taken relatively little notice of the issue. School bus advertising has received the most attention. According to the Education Commission of the States, Arizona, Minnesota, Nevada, New Mexico, Tennessee, and Texas have approved laws within the past two years permitting the practice. States where legislation to allow bus advertising was proposed but failed include Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, and Oklahoma. Overall, a 1997 survey by the National School Transportation Association found that 38 states expressly prohibit school bus ads.

Perhaps the most ambitious state action is legislation introduced in Wisconsin this year by state Representative Marlin Schneider (D) to ban advertising in schools. Schneider's outright ban prompted an outcry from school boards and superintendents, he says, so a "watered-down" version was substituted and approved by the education committee, though it will have to be reintroduced next year. The substitute had three key stipulations, Schneider says: (1) no exclusive contracts between schools and businesses; (2) no nondisparagement clauses precluding educators from expressing their views about a company; and (3) no contracts that require advertising.

Private Dollars, Public Schools

The increasing commercialization of schools could gradually shift the notion of what a "public" school really is. Arnold Fege, former government relations director for the National PTA, warns that as schools grow more dependent on corporate dollars, the question becomes, Who owns the schools? The variety of approaches to schoolhouse commercialism suggest there is no broad consensus on what is appropriate. The trouble, however, may be less with the disagreement about commercialism and more with the silence of many educators and policymakers regarding the ethical dilemmas posed by the topic. "At a time when commercialism in schools and classrooms appears to be increasing dramatically, it is more than a little puzzling that educators do not seem to have much to say about it," Molnar observes (1998, p. 46). Local authorities are making pragmatic financial decisions on commercialism to meet short-term needs. But these decisions have a profoundly moral component. Collectively these decisions are likely to have long-term consequences for the future of public education overall.

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